A zine about isolation, connectedness & survival in dark times

QUARANZINE!

edited by Mad Covid
Quarazine! grew out of the Covid19 pandemic. It draws on the idea that lots of us have already survived extended periods of isolation and restriction of movement - through ill health, state-enforced detention or just a need to be alone. I wanted to amplify the voices of people with mental health problems/chronic illnesses, those of us who've been detained and self-described introverts, to find out how we were relating to the lockdown.

It is a mix of art, practical advice, personal experiences, playlists and even a recipe! I hope it offers a different perspective on how we survive isolation in a way that other narratives on the pandemic may have missed.

Content warning: Mentions of suicide, eating distress, psychiatric detention, prison, voice hearing, abusive relationships.

Who are Mad Covid?

Mad Covid is a shared space for mental health survivor / service user led projects and initiatives that started during the COVID19 pandemic.

You can find links to all the resources in this zine at our website
Mad Covid Diaries is a project that aims to document the lived experiences of those of us who were mad before the entire world went Covid crazy. We felt that people with existing mental illness were being left out of the narrative around Covid19 and mental health. Our diarists create regular blogs, vlogs and art about their experiences in the pandemic.

We have recently begun Mad Covid Voices, a sister project that captures the experiences of people who may not feel able to write diaries. Based on interviews with SUs we are writing regular blogs on the themes that come up, including accessing care in a crisis, medication and inpatient services. Our hope is to amplify the voices of people using these secondary, tertiary and inpatient services to document in real time what is happening and influence change.

Mad Covid Hardship Fund

The Hardship Fund was originally set up by Jo Edge for those who struggle with mental illness who are facing financial hardship because of Covid19 in the UK. It is now a Mad Covid run project and we have been giving out grants of up to £200 based on people's circumstances. To date we have raised over £13,000!

You can read about all the Mad Covid projects at: www.madcovid.com
How the pandemic taught me to stop hating myself (but hate myself for it)

Everything is so simple now. Up until I left home I had one huge worry of getting away from my abusive mother. Then I left home and managed to replace that with a million tiny worries. When I didn’t have my parent telling me what was wrong with me I filled the gap with finding my own things wrong with me. Until recently, I was worrying about every decision, terrified I would do something wrong and have more reasons to blame myself. I constantly questioned whether to change my job or career, move to another city or country, and how to find more time to do the things I really wanted to do and all that.

And then all of those worries went away overnight to be replaced with one big worry.

For the first few days I felt invincible, like was this actually what I was waiting for, a crisis where I no longer had to make decisions or sweat the small stuff because the big stuff was now so fucking huge? Now there was only one bad thing I could do (to go out and potentially infect people). If I didn’t do that there was nothing left to worry about - even I couldn’t find a way to blame myself for a global pandemic that began in China. Worrying about making the wrong decisions filled so much of my time and now I had no more decisions to make. No one knows what’s going to happen so you can’t plan for your future which is bad, but you don’t have to plan for your future which is...maybe good? In a bad way.

I have always been angry at the idea of mindfulness. In the absence of any real mental healthcare provision why not try an app? Why not go away and do something that does nothing - but costs nothing! Mindfulness, meditation, none of it ever drowned out the fizzing in my brain - until my life got reduced to one walk a day and then I had to make the most of every minute outdoors. I was able to put down my phone, sit and look at the view and finally, it was enough. I hated to admit it but I could finally - spit! - practice mindfulness. It’s going to take so much more than that to get through everything that follows but at least I found some calm before the storm.

by Kate
"We Need Space To Heal looks into social distancing as literally creating space between people, but also looks into the current situation as a mass breakup where we all need to spend time apart to heal old wounds"
"Fuck You, I'm Still Alive": Nell's Quarantine Playlist

This playlist is about survival, being alone, injustice, and finding joy in terrible times. You can find it on Spotify by searching madcovid nellaitch

1. Onsind - Never Trust a Tory
2. AJJ - Normalisation Blues
3. The Spook School - Still Alive
4. Camp Cope - Keep Growing
5. Adrianne Lenker - Steamboat
6. Adult Mom - Be Your Own 3am
7. The Mountain Goats - This Year
8. Cosmit - Rolling Sea
9. Skunk Anansie - Yes, it's Fucking Political
10. Worriers - WTF is Sleep
11. Martha - Love Keeps Kicking
12. Screaming Females - Shake It Off (Taylor Swift)

🎵 I am gonna make it through this year if it kills me 🎵

@ nellaitch
Reasons to be cheerful: ignoring the apocalypse playlist

Listen to this playlist when you either a) want to dance and pretend the apocalypse isn’t happening for a moment, or b) want to spend some time daydreaming about life before or after the apocalypse.

1. Otis Redding – Wonderful World
2. Bjork – Like Someone in Love
3. Fleetwood Mac – Never Going Back Again
4. The Rolling Stones – Undercover of the Night
5. New Order – Your Silent Face
6. David Bowie – Golden Years
7. Finlay Quaye – Even After All
8. Lou Reed – Perfect Day
9. The Clash – Rock the Casbah
10. Aretha Franklin – Respect
11. Donovan – Catch the Wind
12. Lana Del Ray – Radio

by Amelia Ryder
@ ameliajojoryder
What I Ate During Quarantine by Alaina L

1. Grilled Cheese
2. Costco Frozen Pizza
3. Fried Rice made with Leftover Rice
4. Toasted PB&J
5. Yogurt
6. Instant Oatmeal
7. Takeout Falafel Sandwich
8. Pancakes made from a Box Mix
9. Trader Joe's Samosas

Playlist: Everything Will Be Alright

1. Everything Will Be Alright - The Killers
2. I'm Still Here - Sia
3. Changes - David Bowie
4. Champion - Fall Out Boy
5. Let It Be - The Beatles
6. Closer to Fine - Indigo Girls
7. The Show Must Go On - Queen
8. This Year - The Mountain Goats

Alaina L. (she/her) is a 23-year-old childcare support educator in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She is autistic and is doing her best to cope with these challenging times through contributing to zines and reading a lot of books.
Two years ago, I was admitted to a psychiatric unit for the first time. I spent two months in the prison that is the psych ward, half of which was spent detained under section 2 of the Mental Health Act. This meant that I was not permitted to leave the hospital in this time as I was deemed to not have the capacity to make decisions on my care, although even when I wasn't under section I still only left three times for a couple of hours.

I can't help but feel the current situation is a walk in a park compared to what lies in the past, and I feel moderately equipped with skills to deal with this isolation in a much nicer environment. Despite this, I know that this will be a new and strange experience for many, and alot of people won't have the experience or the coping strategies to deal with such isolation.

The first and most important tip for surviving isolation is communication, whether that may be with the people you live with or through social media. Staying connected helps us to stay in touch with some normality and to check in on each others well being. During hospital, despite my friends initially not knowing where I was, I still kept messaging them as normal to try and distract from my new reality. As well as this, I would often have in depth conversations with other patients who could relate to how I felt or staff members who could provide support and friendly conversation.

Fresh air is also important. Even if it's just opening a window or sitting in the garden. My first two weeks in hospital I didn't step foot in the enclosed courtyard we had, and this made me very agoraphobic when it came to entering the outdoors once again. The longer we don't do something that provokes fear within us, the more anxiety over the situation it can create.

One of my favourite ways of dealing with being detained was interacting with the therapy dog we had visit the ward once a week. If you are lucky enough to own a pet, take advantage! Playing with a cat or dog (or other pet) can increase levels of dopamine and serotonin in the brain, which are our body's natural feel good hormones. Other suggestions that may help pass the time include card games, bingo, board games, books, and arts and crafts. Be creative! Technology doesn't need to dominate your time in isolation, it's amazing what our minds can come up with when we let our imagination flow!

Finally, for those with existing eating related mental health issues, your mind may play tricks on you in this time, but trust me this is not an excuse to allow you thoughts to dominate. It may feel like a way to take control over something in a time of uncertainty, but this disordered thinking leads to major consequences long term. It's more important than ever to maintain good levels of fluids and adequate food intake during this time. Healthy food in an adequate quantity makes us feel good, and will help us to maintain mental clarity during isolation to filter out the irrational intrusive thoughts we may be subject to.

I hope my experiences and tips can help someone reading this, and remember to stay safe and look out for each other!
BEING AUTISTIC
AND HAVING MENTAL
HEALTH ISSUES
IN A PANDEMIC

People's problems sometimes affect their children. To rate your problem's severity, please indicate how many days a week you are affected.

I'm autistic and I have a PDA profile. This stands for pathological demand avoidance, and means that perceived demands on me cause a lot of stress and resistance. This can be due to demands like needing to shower or go to bed or demands from the outside world like the school run or a social engagement I've agreed to go to.

My PDA and mental health problems (history of BPD, current difficulties with anxiety and depression) have interacted with the pandemic situation in interesting ways. While my anxiety around health and money have gone into overdrive, some of the stress that comes from my PDA has changed in a more complicated fashion.

I usually feel really resistant to leaving the house at all. Engagements outside of my house often require several step processes, each of which can cause anxiety and sensory difficulty. The executive function required to get ready and leave, plus drive my car somewhere, plus park, plus doing whatever the thing itself is, then coming home again, feels like a massive demand on me and something that will use lots of mental spoons and probably leave me in a depressed mood and/or shutdown.

Now there aren't any demands to leave the house. That pressure has suddenly and painfully vanished.

Now the demand is to stay inside. Guess what my PDA has to say about that? I feel claustrophobic even though what I'm being asked to do is mostly what I do anyway. I feel angry and resistant to it as a demand, it feels like an immense pressure bearing down on me.

As an autistic I'm also missing the routine that the school run offered me. I hated the school run, but it did reduce my depression to have to regularly walk outside. I have been trying to walk outside about every other day during lockdown, for my permitted exercise. It's hard to get motivated to do it without a purpose (other than escaping the house for twenty minutes).

Another big shift for a person like me, who struggles with social anxiety, is the change to socialising online. The first week I did so much, because it didn't register with me that socialising online is still socialising. It sounds obvious, but I suppose I didn't expect it to use the same quantity of spoons because I didn't have to travel anywhere.
It's true that without the effort of leaving the house, and having to drive (which I hate), there are a lot of things that are much more accessible. Socialising online has opened up so many things to me that I have never made it along to before. But I am finding that video conference style online socialising uses even more social spoons than face to face socialising usually does.

I know all the tactics I've painstakingly learnt while masking my autism before I realised I was autistic just don't work in the same way online, it's such a different situation. You don't know when people are looking at you. The intervals of when a new person should speak don't work the same online. There's no scope for chatting in twos or threes within a bigger group so everything feels like making a speech!

I find when video conferencing with a group, I start to zone out after about twenty minutes. This happens at in person events, but I can usually cope for longer. I've decided if it all gets too much, I'll 'leave' a chat and claim technical issues. It's harder to escape in-person situations (and then I'm left with the task of getting myself home).

I feel like plans right now are generally more flexible, and that has helped me. How I feel varies so much day to day and I am freer to do WHAT I am able to, WHEN I am able to do it. There are fewer external pressures and timetables (and I say that as someone with young kids, who place plenty of demands on me day to day!).

I am cherishing time with my family and glad I have a partner who understands when I am struggling. They allow me the space to try to manage my anxiety, or sleep in if I need too. Getting out of bed is a huge battle at the moment, as is showering, which I usually only do (eventually) due to school run induced greasy hair shame.

I hope there's a permanent shift, after all this, to making things more accessible. Online meet ups, flexible hours and working from home, more deliveries and click and collect options for shopping. These are things that many of us have needed always, and they are only becoming the norm now non disabled folk need them too.

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Are you not working full time (30 hours or more) or part time?

Reading fluffy young adult novels
Crafting
Getting dressed every day
Decorating my planner
Keep a log of things I want to do 'after all this, in an effort to convince myself there will be an after all this'
Checking in on friends by phone or text
How many working days?

If you have been off sick for more than a month, how many months?

Are you getting Statutory Sick Pay?

by Human Bean
A Zine
Within a Zine!

by Yasmine Kahsai

@ yaskahsai
"Anything becomes interesting if you look at it long enough"
At the start of March, I was in artist in resident in Ljubljana Slovenia, about to have a dream month touring Italy in April (as my book Shy Radical has just been translated into Italian - Venice, Milan, Rome, Turin), Switzerland and Norway. I was blissfully content and happy and living a dream. Then it all collapsed. Corona struck and I was sent home within 24 hours first flight to London Gatwick. I have been there ever since… I am still there now.

1. Tidying your room is great curatorial practice. It's like curating a retrospective with new historical rereadings and categories of old objects. Grouping ephemera and old archive. Dig back in. Resort it out. Box it. File it. Find old drawings, family photo albums, old hard drives, unread books and zines. Curate it by year, nations, narratives, invent new categories for old object. I didn't tidy my room because I went out too much!

2. Make a Friends shelf on your Bookshelf. I rearranged my bookshelf and made a friends bookshelf of books written by my friends. But maybe you can also make a bookshelf of books gifted by your friends if you don't have many writer friends. I get so many books as gifts on birthdays and sadly never read them for year. Now's the time..

3. Learn from prisoners in solitary confinement who are in lockdown 23 hours a day but manage to keep their imagination alive. I supported a brother in solitary confinement (extradited by Theresa May as Home Secretarary in 2012 to a death row supermax prison in USA see: freetalha.org for the archives - he is now free and survived… ) Solitary Watch in New York features lots of pictures of artwork by prisoners in solitary … https://solitarywatch.org. Read the book: Hell is a Very Small Place edited by them

DOWNLOAD THIS ZINE: Survivors manual: How to survive in solitary confinement. A zine written by prisoners written in solitary confinement for others in solitary confinement FREE PDF here: https://www.afsc.org/document/survivors-manual-how-survive-solitary-confinement Photo requests from solitary confinements has images to keep you alive

See my brothers Talha poem OTHERSTANI (just type that in youtube - he wrote that in solitary confinement and I supported him all that way … it inspired my own book and the imaginary nation of Aspergistan)
4. Draw every morning. Go back to the elements. I bought a box of colour pencils and set myself elemental exercises. Draw the Alphabet: English, Arabic, Czech, Slovenian… Draw 100 lines on a page. Draw lines: left to right (one page) right to left (one page) up and down lines (one page) down and up (one page) change variables each time but only by one rule each time. See look at the energy of the lines and patterns you are making. Slow down and observe… .

5. Curate a project around an old family photo album. MUM exhibition proposal was Mothering Sunday 22nd March 2020. We were all in Lockdown … My mum was in Bangladesh and I was trapped in self-isolation. London, UK So I had this idea… Life before camera phones. I found an old family photo album that my mum kept and am thinking of curating an exhibition called MUM … now. Of exhibition of my mums life. Curating needs to be reclaimed from the elite cliques of Goldsmiths and Royal College of Art and back to basics and soul. Start with an old picture and then a recent picture of a parent and imagine the journey inbetween… I pledge to do this exhibition one day. (Then my mum will finally understand what I do for a living…) Older people are feeling vulnerable and unvalued in Boris Britain.
Hamja is an artist, writer, curator and human rights campaigner based in London, UK Curator of DIY CULTURES Zine & creative activist festival Author of the book Shy Radicals: Antisystemic Politics of the militant introvert

Instragram/ tweets: @hamjaahsan & @shyradicals (email: hamjaahsan@gmail.com)
I started lockdown with a 2 month head start on most of the general population. When my mental health gets worse my life shrinks, and I’d been stuck in my flat since January.

But while I was able to leave the house occasionally in that time, lockdown was like a more extreme version of my self-imposed isolation. At first it reminded me of the times I’ve been detained in hospital under the Mental Health Act. I was reminded of the power of the law to keep us locked up for our health. I felt claustrophobic just knowing that I wasn’t allowed out, even when I didn’t particularly want to go anywhere. My already diminished concentration turned non-existent. I went between pacing the flat and lying in bed for days on end. At least in this version of government-imposed lockdown there is no forced medication, restraints or suicide watch.

The voices I hear, ever adaptable, began to shift their attention to the worldwide pandemic. I was infectious and dangerous. Every human contact was a possibility to cause untold harm. I didn’t dare leave the house, see the postman, accept a delivery. I cried every night thinking about the people I love and how I could never see them again without potentially killing them.

Slowly the dust settled and I began to accept my new reality. I braved the walk the government allows us once a day. It reminded me again of my hospital experiences – the 20 minutes off the ward I’d be tentatively granted where I’d walk aimlessly around the streets near the hospital, knowing there was no time to actually go anywhere, just soak in the relief of having a bit of freedom. Except this time there is no building up that time – no proving I can behave and not be Mad outside so I can be granted one hour next time, two, four, a whole day eventually. The virus doesn’t care if we behave.

Surviving Lockdown While Mad Tips:

- It’s OK if you aren’t productive. There is always pressure to DO and even with the whole world in quarantine, that narrative hasn’t let up. If you get through each day having survived, you’ve done great.

- Connect with someone. I gave myself social burnout in the first weeks of lockdown after too many zoom calls and WhatsApp chats pinging at me. But I’m so grateful for the technology that allows me to talk to people, despite being apart.
• Food is still important to keep you well! You don’t need to cook any fancy dinners but making sure you eat something everyday is essential. It has been difficult for me to get my usual delivery from supermarkets but I’ve found I had the most luck with Iceland and Co Op.

• Finally, go easy on yourself. Some days you might not wash, or open the window or even talk to anyone. You are allowed days like this without self-punishment. You’re doing the best you can in extreme circumstances.

by Teri Anderson

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Surviving Solitary by Learning to Draw
Helen Leigh-Ruppersdahl.

I survived many years of social isolation following severe mental illness, and subsequent physical disability, by developing a passion for art. At first I just followed other artists, eventually I learned to draw—all through online classes. There’s a wealth of online instruction to suit all budgets—all you need is a pen and a piece of paper!

@helenlp    @drhelenlp
Free Online Art Classes

Sketchbooks: an online course
https://www.accessart.org.uk/sketchbooks-an-online-course-for-children-families-parents-teachers/

Angela Fehr’s Watercolour Jumpstart course
https://learn.angelafehr.com/p/jumpstart/

Paint your feelings
https://youtu.be/VOVwLkeMHHQ

Cathy Johnson has a YouTube channel full of mini tutorials
https://www.youtube.com/user/KateJosTube

Weekly Art Lessons Staycation series (especially for the lockdown)
http://weeklyartlesson.com/category/staycation/

Quarantine draw-alongs
https://www.fastcompany.com/90478307/stuck-at-home-take-free-drawing-classes-from-famous-illustrators?
via=indexdotco&fbclid=IwAR1DeoTA524uLqL7t5EPD2E1H2Vl1CT2HMtMoV2EdmzWlsIcxlamBJkat0E

10 University art classes you can take for free online
https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-10-university-art-classes-free-online?

Strathmore Artist Papers Online Drawing Classes
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL9AjCVLhzTrQNDvVY8J2-A64uk7ovJRUm

Artists Network Classes
https://www.artistsnetwork.com/free-art-instruction/

Arty Factory Lessons
https://www.artyfactory.com/?fbclid=IwAR3nxBwF2-5GAo3Qx4iF3 UbTteWSyHoL1h0TXzwUn47RytV1DBT-wqmr5A

All links available at Mad Covid website!
Ingredients:

1 TSP CUMIN
1 TSP CORIANDER
1 TSP CHILLI FLAKES
2 TSP TUMERIC

1 ONION
3 CLOVES GARLIC
2 CARROTS
1 STALK CELERY
125G RED LENTILS
750ML STOCK

(OPTION - 1 TIN COCONUT MILK, FRESH CORIANDER)

1. To get ready dice all the veg, measure out your lentils and spices, and make your stock. Grab a large saucepan.

2. Soften the onion and garlic in a tsp of cooking oil for 5 minutes.

3. Add the spices and cook for 2 minutes. (The aroma of the spices will begin to fill the kitchen)

4. Add the carrot, celery, and a dash of stock. Put the lid on (slightly ajar), and soften for roughly 10 minutes, stirring regularly.

5. Add the lentils and stock. Put the lid on and bring to a simmer for 20 minutes, stir regularly until the lentils are soft and breaking down.

6. Remove from the heat and let it cool for 5 minutes. Use a hand blender to bring it all together.

7. Add salt, pepper, coconut milk and/or coriander to your own taste.

This’ll still be delicious if you haven’t got all the ingredients. *’s next to the things which are essential. You can use also use water instead of stock.
Learning to Enjoy My Own Company

Anon

I guess the first thing I’d say, is I do pretty well with isolation because I’ve always been a solitary person. I’ve never been the type who’s so terrified of being alone that they creep into their sleepover friend’s room early in the morning, sit on their bed and stare at them until they wake up (yep, I had that friend!). There’s been times I’ve gone years with no interaction other than with the corner shop guy, who once asked me if I had a pet monkey at home because I always bought a lot of bananas. Anyway, the only nugget of information I have is this: learn to enjoy your own company.

We who prefer isolation pretty much know how to do that, but for those forced into isolation it can be really hard to learn how to live with yourself. You don’t actually have to like yourself, btw; it isn’t a self esteem thing as much as it’s a "getting comfortable with the uncomfortable, scary bits about being alone" thing.

There are lots of ways of enjoying your own company that doesn't have to involve any navel gazing or deep emotional dives into one's psyche. There's no requirement to lock yourself in a soundproof room for sixteen hours with just your thoughts and a CD of whalesong playing on an endless loop (unless that's what you like to do). You can use your time with yourself however you want, it doesn't have to be 'useful' or 'productive'. Want to slather yourself in honey and pretend you're a walrus? Have at it!

The key, I think, is learning to enjoy that time with yourself for what it is, rather than using time as a way to count down the hours until someone, anyone, turns up to take you out of yourself. I think if you're always relying on random warm bodies to make you feel less lonely, it'll be harder to learn to like your own company, and I don't know if it's healthy to be in a situation where you're admitting any old Tom, Dickwad and Sally into your space because "they might be toxic, but at least they're there!" You deserve way better than that.

Huh. So I guess it is a teensy bit about self esteem after all.

When you can enjoy your own company, other people become a bonus, not a need. And they kinda like it when they know you want them, not a human shaped presence that they happen to conveniently fill. So in learning to enjoy your own company, you can also choose and appreciate those you genuinely want to spend time with. Mostly, though, you get to appreciate yourself.
Crisis and Me and BPD

I’ve had a lot of people checking up on me over the last week or so, which is really lovely. People are concerned because they know I suffer badly with anxiety and depression, so naturally I could be LOSING MY SHIT right about now. And that would be a totally understandable response to the current worldwide situation.

But the truth? Actually I’m… fine. Don’t get me wrong, I’m as weirded-out as everyone else at the moment, disappointed that my fledgling business is on hiatus, and the thought of having my husband working from home for the next few months makes me feel a bit twitchy but generally I’m doing okay. I have a diagnosis of Borderline Personality Disorder, have experienced crippling anxiety and depression, and was an inpatient in a psychiatric ward for nearly 3 weeks in 2018; my mental health would probably be described as somewhat ropier than most people’s, so why am I not running round in a circle screaming or curled up on a corner shaking? Trust me, I’ve been asking myself that a lot recently and there’s only one thing I can think of: I’ve faced a different kind of apocalyptic crisis and survived. On 7th May 2018 my world as I knew it ended, everything changed and I didn’t know what was going to happen next. I was at home from work for months, barely saw anyone, and had to face a foe I couldn’t even see.

Okay, okay, before anyone starts having a go saying that a complete mental breakdown and a global pandemic are not comparable, I’m not saying they are really, just that there’s a couple of things that I think I have taken from one to help me gain perspective on the other. Hear me out…

1. Loss of routine

It’s a year to the day since I handed in my notice at the school I worked in. Before that, I had been on sick leave for 10 months. That’s 22 months since I lost the rigid sense of routine that working, especially in a school, provides. I went from being busy to being someone who spent most of their time in the house alone. I had to build a routine out of what I had, and gradually I did manage it. Even tiny things like getting up, showered and making breakfast gave me structure. What TV shows I wanted to watch helped, too. I’d designate craft time, reading time, time to exercise. It took a while but eventually I did adjust to having to create my own little routine, and it’s stood me in good stead for starting my own business, which obviously means self-discipline and time-management. And it means that now, when we’re all having to spend a lot more time at home, it’s not uncharted territory for me.

2. Coping with uncertainty

We have always lived with uncertainty, every second of every day. It’s just that now one massively scary thing is dominating the news and our brains and making us all face the fact that everything we thought was certain is actually incredibly fragile and subject to sudden change. That sounds awful, but it does have a flip side of making us more grateful for where we are right now. In 2018 I went from being a newly married teaching assistant who was building a career as a psychotherapist, and planning to start a family, to a suicidally ill person who could no longer do any of those things (except remain married, which we managed!). All my ‘certain’s were gone. I had to exist day to day and trust that by doing things on a smaller scale, I would eventually build myself back up to a place where I felt comfortable to plan for the future again. And you know what? It did work.
3. Who am I?

As I just mentioned, my breakdown meant that I lost a lot of the things that I felt gave me my identity. Jobs, and who we are at work, give us a MASSIVE sense of this, and I know that a lot of people are currently struggling because even if they can work from home, this is not as fulfilling or sociable as seeing your colleagues every day. Yep, been there. It sucks, but I guess I did find other ways to feel like myself again. Even if I couldn’t get out to see people (I self-isolated before it was cool), I tried my damnedest to keep in touch with them via texts, WhatsApp, Facebook or FaceTime. I even wrote... letters. I reconnected with the bits of me that weren’t tied into my job, and slowly, slowly, slowly began to remember them. I was, and always had been, more than my job, and it didn’t do me any harm to figure that out.

4. Fear

For over a year, I lived with shapeless, shifting, blood-curdling fear. Fear that I was never going to feel like a real person ever again, fear that I’d always be poorly, that we’d never be able start a family, and ultimately the fear that I’d eventually lose my battle with my own mind. This isn’t just me remembering it wrongly - my family will tell you that I lived in a constant state of terror. I shook, vomited and hid from everything. Even just writing about it now makes my heart rate go up, I can feel it in my chest.

I CRAVED instruction and a clear plan. I remember saying so many times that I just wished someone would say to me ‘if you follow these clear steps the chances are strong that you WILL survive this’. Experts, health officials and people who know a lot more than me about pandemics and viruses are giving us clear steps now, and I am happy to follow them. I know that they won’t necessarily keep me and those I love completely safe, but odds are they will. Also, there are practical things I can do here to stay well and safe, and practical steps are always helpful in a crisis, even if it’s just singing ‘Happy Birthday’ twice while I wash my hands.

I am in no way saying that everyone who has experienced a mental health crisis will feel the same way as me, or indeed that people who haven’t are at a disadvantage (ha!), I’m just trying to make sense of the way I am coping at the moment. I am aware that my mental health, and everyone’s, is fragile and that I need to do extra things to keep myself well mentally as well as physically at this time. I would also like to highlight that I do not suffer from health anxiety, and I cannot imagine how difficult this all must be if you do.

All that, and I haven’t actually said ‘coronavirus’ once.

by Sarah Poulton

@ mrs_s_c_p
What are your introvert
SUPERPOWERS?

by Nell

I decided to draw on my extensive experience as a life-long introvert to identify... INTROVERT SUPERPOWERS! I know the extrovert/introvert binary doesn’t make sense to everyone, but as someone who gathers their energy from being alone, I have always identified with being an introvert in a world that’s mostly set up to cater to the more extroverted amongst us. It’s very weird seeing all the things that are rarely encouraged in the mainstream media suddenly being actively encouraged (cancelling plans, JOMO, staying home). Fellow introverts add your own!

ENJOYING YOUR OWN COMPANY

JOY OF MISSING OUT (JOMO)

STAYING HOME

CANCELLING PLANS
What are YOUR introvert SUPERPOWERS?

“Having always had hobbies that are solitary. Meaning my house is filled with entertainment. So many books to read, crafts to finish, shows & movies to watch.

Gleefully ignoring the telephone ringing and door knocking.

“Crafting, daydreaming, staring out the window, reorganising my cupboards, not feeling like talking to anyone.”
"We were mad before the whole world went Covid19 crazy"